

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE C13

THE WASHINGTON POST
8 March 1982

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What's Qaddafi Really Like? Take a Look

The CIA has confirmed that Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi was the target of an assassination attempt by his army late last year, as I first reported two months ago.

Intelligence sources say there have been six previous attempts on Qaddafi's life over the past decade in which he was wounded, in the arm, shoulder, stomach and legs.

Interestingly, the latest attempt came amid increasing evidence that the 39-year-old dictator has given his blessing to the development of a personality cult, like Stalin and Mao Tse-tung before him. Where previously he was referred to merely by his military rank of colonel, the Libyan media now fawn on him as "the commander," "the leader" and even "the greatest intellectual of the country."

Not bad for someone who began life in a Bedouin camp in the Libyan desert. But even his worst enemies would not deny that Muammar is a very remarkable man.

I have followed Qaddafi's career from the start. He has always been a pan-Islamic missionary of messianic

proportions. Until recently he affected an image of self-effacing simplicity, a sort of "first among equals." When I first interviewed him he received me in a Bedouin tent, and his interpreter frequently argued with him vehemently. Now, apparently, it suits Qaddafi's purpose to indulge in the kind of self-glorifying hyperbole to which most dictators succumb sooner or later.

What is the man really like? It's difficult to say exactly. He is, as one analysis concluded, "a combination of contraries." But my associate Indy Badhwar has seen intelligence reports that profile the Arab fanatic who is near the top of the Reagan administration's foreign enemies list. Some of the secrets they disclose:

- Qaddafi is devout to the point of religious zealotry. He says all the prayers required by Islamic law, drinks no liquor and follows a tribal custom of eating no fish. He is inclined to lecture captive audiences with long-winded, rambling sermons, and seems to regard himself as a teacher and a preacher. He has undoubted charisma.

- He is apparently a man of genuinely simple tastes. He lives in a small, sparsely furnished house, though sources say he is building himself another home in the area where he was born, and has accepted the gift of a farm from the township of El-Marj. His one proud possession is a Fiat 128, which he drives. Before he acquired the Fiat he drove a

Volkswagen he had bought before the revolution that brought him to power.

- Qaddafi likes to keep in touch with the people. In the early years of his rule, according to one intelligence report, he "used to wander through the streets and marketplaces incognito in order to see and hear what was being said." He also used to drop in unannounced at government offices to check up on the bureaucrats.

- He exercises close control over the media. If he dislikes a program being broadcast he will telephone the station and order it off the air.

- Never one to stand on diplomatic ceremony, Qaddafi has been known to telephone other Arab leaders at odd hours, and he has shown up in foreign countries without advance notice, sometimes without even informing his hosts privately.

- "He is inclined to periods of silence and self-imposed isolation, disappearing from the public for long periods of time and staying in isolation in the desert," according to an Israeli intelligence profile. Though often spontaneous to the point of impulsiveness, and prone to outbursts of anger, Qaddafi is also capable of analyzing political events logically and acting according to long-range plans.

- Qaddafi is a man of moods. He is extremely sensitive and his feelings are easily hurt. He often suffers periods of depression.